

Title: The National Archives' User Forum

Date: 18 August 2012

Location: Talks Room

Attendees (staff):

Jeff James (JJ), Director of Operations and Services (Chair)

James Lawson (JL), Customer Intelligence Manager

Sue South (SS), Records Specialist

Roger Kershaw (RK), Head of Military, Maritime, Transport & Family

Tom Gregan (TG), Head of Document Services

David Priest (DP), Production Co-ordination Manager

Mark Jones (MJ), Customer Intelligence Assistant

Attendees (users):

Graham Woolgar, Michael Hill, Hazel Farran, Annie Thompson, John Seaman, Rosalind Turner, Brenda Hawkins, Hilary Carey, Ron Platt, Martin Kane, Richard Bateson, Christine Hayek, Francis Howcutt

1. Matters arising from the last meeting

1.1. There will be an update on the Red Lists survey at the next User Advisory Group meeting on 11 September and the next User Forum meeting on 11 October.

1.2. There will be an update on the Records Decision Panel and Re-closure policy at the 11 October meeting which will be attended by Julia Stocken, Head of Information management and Practice (IMP). It was agreed that Stuart Abraham (Accessions and FOI Centre Manager) would be invited to join Julia Stocken).

1.3. Following a suggestion from a User Forum attendee, it has been agreed that some text will be inserted on the online catalogue advising that the most up to date information is on Discovery. (*Post meeting note: this has now been done*).

1.4. A document listing the top 25 most popular series was circulated by DP following a request at the last meeting in July. It was agreed that list of the most popular 100 individual documents would also be produced (*Post meeting note: this is now available; see separate document*).

1.5. A User Forum meeting dedicated to 'mopping up' any outstanding issues from previous meetings has been set for November. We will come back to the October meeting with items that we have identified but users will be encouraged to add to this list.

1.6. Correction: At the last meeting it was stated (by a user) that MEPO 9/152 had been retained and transferred to Surrey Police and subsequently lost. Following an investigation in to this matter, we have established that this is not the case. The document is held by the Metropolitan Police Service, and the TNA Catalogue is correct in stating the piece is retained under Section 3(4) of the Public Record Act. It was not transferred to Surrey Police.

1.7. Q: The London Family History Centre (LDS) seems to be well established in The National Archives now. Can you tell us more about how this was arranged? Has this been done before?

A: We have accommodated the LDS before about 10 years ago. In the case of the current arrangement, JJ was approached by the LDS (whose permanent premises are being renovated) and it was agreed by the executive team that we could accommodate them. A memorandum of understanding was drawn up between us and the LDS. This will end on 31st March 2013. However, in September JJ will be having a meeting with the LDS to discuss what the current status is with regard to the refurbishment. The LDS donate £12,500 per quarter to the Friends of The National Archives throughout the period of their relocation.

1.8. Q: Can a discussion about the distinction between the User Forum and User Advisory Group and the effectiveness of the 2 fora be added to the agenda for the 'mopping up' meeting in November?

A: Yes.

1.9. Q: Can you consider extending the length of the meeting on this occasion?

A: Yes, we will consider this.

1.10. Q: With regard to the previous meetings minutes and the question of when the Second World War Navy and Air Force service records will be made available, the answer given does not answer the question that was asked.

A: We will look in to this and get a fuller answer / clarification for the next meeting.

1.11. Q: Can I ask a question regarding the Manual of Access to Public Records?

A: We suggest this is raised with Julia Stocken at the next meeting.

1.12.Q: The floor of the adapted toilet near the lift on the first floor is often wet because water splashes out of the sink. Please could you investigate?

A: Yes, we'll let our Facilities team know. Thank you for pointing this out.

2. Updates – Jeff James

2.1. A new Records collection policy has now been published as a draft for comment: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/draft-policies.htm>

2.2. Archives for the 21st Century in Action, refreshed, (an updated action plan for archives) has recently been published and can be found here: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archives/archives21centuryrefreshed-final.pdf>

2.3. The annual survey of accessions to repositories (covering 2011) has recently been completed and descriptions of the relevant records can now be accessed via the [National Register of Archives](#)

2.4. Discovery has recently been updated. A list of recent enhancements can be found on [LABS](#).

3. Open Discussion

3.1. Q: I heard on a recent radio programme that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) have filmed / digitised the 2011 Census returns and shredded the originals. There would appear to be a big discrepancy between this and the care The National Archives are taking to digitise the Home Guard records. Shouldn't someone here be advising ONS?

A: I am not aware of what the ONS have or haven't done with the 2011 Census returns so will need to investigate this further via the Information Management and Practice department. Our role is to advise government departments on records management issues (and this certainly includes the ONS) but we have limited powers until records come in to our care.

3.2. Q: I find the library catalogue very difficult to use. In particular there are some functions that are accessible for staff only. Could it be made clearer where this is the case, or better still, could the functions that can't be accessed by the public be hidden?

A: The new library system utilises open source software known as Koha, and there are some functions of this that members of the public don't have access to because this would not meet our data protection restrictions (as the system is hosted on a server off site). However it is necessary that these functions are available to members of staff. We feel that the benefits of this (free) resource significantly outweigh any drawbacks. However we will investigate this issue and, if necessary, see if it is possible to make it clearer where certain functions are only available to staff. We will also investigate the possibility of updating guidance and ensure that staff on the advice desks are familiar with these issues.

3.3. Q: I have found a number of Special Operations Executive (SOE) files that are closed. Is it possible to request that these are opened?

A: Yes. You will need to make a Freedom of Information request and a link to the form (and guidance) for doing this is available from the catalogue description page of the closed record.

3.4. Q: The library book scanner was removed from the open reading room at the end of July. Will it be returned?

A: No. It has been replaced with a digital camera which is far more cost effective than the old scanners. We are looking to develop a camera that will deliver bi-tonal images as well the grey scale images that we currently have. We hope that this will be ready for release in the next 3 months. However it should be noted that the current set up is satisfactory to 95% of our users, some of whom prefer the greyscale output to bi-tonal.

3.5. Q: Where are the Royal Observer Corps service records held and when will they be released?

A: We will find out and report back at the next meeting.

3.6. Q: There have been lots of closures at Remploy Ltd recently. Can you look in to whether their records are to be kept and whether TNA will provide access to them?

A: Yes, we will look in to this and report back at the next meeting.

3.7. Q: Has there been any feedback on the success of the Silken Paper Trail event in July? Was it podcasted?

A: Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield and Professor Lisa Jardine CBE engaged in what was effectively a historical debate with a Q and A session also incorporated in to it. It was very well attended and seemed to be equally well received. The debate was podcasted and the link to it can be found here: <http://media.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php/the-silken-paper-trail-openness-and-the-national-collective-memory/>

3.8. Q: During the Queens Diamond Jubilee celebrations you displayed photographs from the catalogue series PP1. Can you provide any details on what is contained in the PP2 and PP3 series? The catalogue states that these series have been transferred to the Royal Archives but the Royal Archives have stated separately that they are exempt from the Freedom of Information act as they don't hold any Public Records.

A: We will look into this.

Next meeting

The next meeting is on Thursday 11 October at 12:30 in the Talks Room